

Comment on M. Pitts' *Hoa Hakananai'a, an Easter Island statue now in the British Museum, photographed in 1868*

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Introduction

I have been invited by the editors of *Rapa Nui Journal* to respond to M. Pitts (*Hoa Hakananai'a, an Easter Island statue now in the British Museum, photographed in 1868*). I have another article on this general topic currently in process, but in the meantime I welcome the opportunity to revisit a very interesting topic. In this response I will explore issues of photographic documentation; the dorsal designs on Hoa Hakananai'a as my colleague Cristián Arévalo Pakarati and I have recorded them (Figure 1), and the question of paint on the statue. I will discuss the latter point in the context of on-going scientific tests on other statues having paint.

Let me begin by pointing out that I first used a photographic print of Hoa Hakananai'a upright on the deck of HMS *Topaze* in my British Museum Occasional Paper 73 (Van Tilburg 1992: Plate 1). That publication is not cited by Pitts. At the time, the photograph was rarely published. I used the same photographic print on the cover of my subsequent British Museum Research Paper 158 (Van Tilburg 2006). It is to this print that Pitts refers.

In our EISP Archives, we have collected upwards of 80,000 images. We are not trained curators, and we have had to learn how images are correctly described, catalogued, cited, credited, and conserved. This information may seem intuitive, but in the digital world of screen grabs and scanning the boundaries are vague.

Therefore, a photograph is an image created by light falling on a light sensitive surface (film). A negative image on film is what is used to create a positive image on paper. That positive image is known as a print. Multiple prints may be made from a single negative, and prints may be numbered and sequenced. Scans of positive images at "high resolution" should define the resolution, which can be anywhere from 300 dpi to 12,800 dpi.

The originator of the print I used in both volumes was (and still is) unknown. I located it as a black and white print in the archives of The Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. I am unsure how that print or the one I received from the Peabody was made; it is not stated on the use permission document. The print could



Figure 1. Three views of Hoa Hakananai'a (1869,10-5.1;BM-LON-001), height 2.42m. Drawing by Cristián Arévalo Pakarati (© 2004 Easter Island Statue Project / Jo Anne Van Tilburg).

have been scanned, although I doubt it. It is more likely that an inter-negative was made from the archive print.

In my 2006 volume, I attributed the location of the photo to "Portsmouth, 1869." I deduced this on the basis of the statue's history at the British Museum Central Archives (Van Tilburg 2006:3). Pitts asserts that the location spot for the photo was Valparaíso, Chile.

The following discussion is supported, in part, by data collected by Mr. Renato Mazzoli, an historian of Latin American photography with forty years experience in his field of interest. He is also the owner of the photographic print of Hoa Hakananai'a aboard H.M.S. *Topaze* that Pitts correctly states was purchased at auction in Paris in 2011. Mr. Mazzoli tells me that, in 1994, a Paris family entrusted to the Galerie Michèle Chomette an album of photographs attributed to Paul-Émile Miot. The gallery, in turn, hired Mr. Pierre Marc Richard to research the newfound album.

In 1995, Mr. Richard produced an "Analytical and Comparative Study" of the newfound album in the context of his inventory of Miot's photographs and negatives, including those held at the Photothèque du Musée de l'Homme (Musée du Quai Branly), a dorsal view of the statue in the Archivio Segreto Vaticano, and elsewhere, as well as three other albums in public institutions and two in private collections. Mr. Richard's research was published in Paris in 1995 as *Paul-Émile Miot 1827-1900 un marin photographe 1857-1870 Terre Neuve Oceanie Senegal Amerique du Sud*, Editions Galerie Michèle Chomette. Richard described the newfound album's provenance as follows:

We assume that before reaching us these photo series were either received as gifts or collected by Jean-Philippe-Ernest de Fauque de Jonquieres. The latter was lieutenant aboard the *Gassendi*, stationed in Newfoundland in 1858, and was another officer who was close to Miot during his voyages and throughout his career in the service of the Marine [trans. R. Mazzoli, 2014].

In 2008, *The Invention of Paradise 1845 Photographs by Paul-Émile Miot, Text by Sydney Picasso* was edited and published by the German Galerie Daniel Blau.

The photo of Hoa Hakananai'a aboard H.M.S. *Topaze* was on a page in the Paris album that also had photographs taken in Nuku Hiva, Marquesas Islands, dated to 1870. The *printed* caption under the photograph in Mr. Richard's published inventory reads "Idole de l'île de Pâques sur le pont du H.M.S. *Topaze* (Valparaiso) décembre 1868." On the undated mount back of the same photograph now in the collection of Mr. Mazzoli, the attribution "Rowsell y Courret Hnos Valparaiso" appears, along with the notation "Une idole de l'île de Pâques pesant 5 tonneaux rapportée par la frégate anglaise la *Topaze*." The accent over the "i" in

Valparaíso is missing in both notations, suggesting that it was not written by a Spanish speaker. Some antiquity is given the inscription in that "tonneaux" and not the more modern French "tonnes". It is unclear, as of this writing, how much (if any) of these notations are the result of Mr. Richard's assumptions.

Miot did not sign any of his prints. The negative of the Hoa Hakananai'a print owned by Mr. Mazzoli is not in the collection of the Musée du Quai Branly (six others are also missing). Other, better documented photos by Miot establish his intermittent presence in Valparaíso between 1868 and 1871. He was certainly there on March 9, 1867 (Getty Research Institute). According to Richard's research, Miot was aboard *I'Astrée*, anchored in Valparaíso Harbor in December, 1868. It is then that he is presumed to have photographed Hoa Hakananai'a on display on the deck of H.M.S. *Topaze*. In the same report, however, Richard wrongly gives "Captain Sainthill Powell" as in command of *Topaze*.

An album of Miot's Canadian photos was auctioned on Nov 15, 2001 and another of his South American and Tahitian photos in May 2001. Mr. Mazzoli has "several lots" from the latter sale, and he tells me that they are all "on Rowsell y Courret Hnos Valparaíso mounts" and numbered. None of these collections include a print or a negative of Hoa Hakananai'a aboard *Topaze*. When Mr. Mazzoli purchased his photograph, it was said to be "unique". So, in the end, we still don't have all of the missing pieces of this puzzle. However, putting it all together, I now believe that it could have been taken by Miot in Valparaíso. We will amend the metadata attached to our print accordingly.

By the way, Pitts also describes two photos inserted into a volume of edited "notes" attributed to the Catholic missionary Hippolyte Roussel. The volume was published in 1926 and the editor claimed that the contents date to 1869. As I pointed out in describing *precisely the same photos* (Van Tilburg 1992:44) "the front view of the statue appears to be either the same photo or taken at the same time as the one in our Pl. 1."

As to *Challenger*, the error Pitts emphasizes was probably made by Roussel's editor. According to Corney (1917:58), confusion about *Challenger* can be traced to the diaries of the ship's Paymaster Richards, who "culled from various authorities" in *Challenger*'s library (Van Tilburg 1992:44).

Early Drawings

The discovery of Hoa Hakananai'a was made by Lt. William Metcalf Lang with Dr. Charles Bailey Greenfield, Assistant Surgeon, and described by Richard Sainthill, who was present at the time (Van Tilburg 2006:28, 35). A sketch of the statue in situ was made by Lt. Matthew James Harrison *the day following discovery* and right before it was collected. This sketch was

discovered by Dr. Dorota Starzecka (BM ETh Doc. 974, 1108) and published by me for the first time (Van Tilburg 2006:35). Lt. Harrison was present when the statue was transported to the ship. He described the event first hand in his valuable “Journal and Remark Book” (Mrs. Kay Chettleburgh [Lt. Harrison’s late granddaughter], EISP Archives, Box B28, Van Tilburg Correspondence).

I note that Pitts raises the possibility that additional images of the statue in situ at ‘Orongo might one day turn up. One can only hope. I made a search for further documentation with the family of Dr. Greenfield but, sadly, according to them, his papers are lost (Van Tilburg 2003; Van Tilburg 2006:64, n. 117). It is true that J. Linton Palmer produced many sketches and watercolors while aboard H.M.S. *Topaze*. It is also true that they include many errors of detail. He and others of the ship’s officers exchanged information and referred to each other’s sketches and journals to describe things they never actually saw.

There is no question that Palmer “was not present when the statue was discovered and did not visit Rano Kau at all except for a few short hours prior to the ship’s departure” (Van Tilburg 2006:36). There is no reason to presume that any of Palmer’s sketches are accurate, first-hand drawings of Hoa Hakananai’a in situ.

We do have one nagging detail, however. In 1869, a writer for *The Illustrated London News* reported that Palmer “has favoured us with some photographs and sketches taken by him last November.” There is nothing to suggest that Palmer had photographic equipment with him during his stint on H.M.S. *Topaze*. What photos, if any, did he give to the journalist, who took them, and where are they now?

In 1880, as I have previously noted, Palmer lent some objects, a map, and six drawings to the Liverpool Museum for a special exhibit. None of Palmer’s objects have been found and Museum staff told Dr. Dorota Starzecka (pers. comm. 1991) that they are assumed to have been lost in WWII. One or two of the drawings and possibly more are now among the Palmer drawings held by the Royal Geographical Society. However, “It is difficult to ascertain exactly which drawings may have been among the Liverpool items, as descriptions of them in the C.T. Gatty catalogue are somewhat general” (Van Tilburg 1992:44; emphasis added).

Paint and Pigments on Hoa Hakananai’a

Was Hoa Hakananai’a painted when it was found embedded in the ground inside one of the stone buildings at ‘Orongo? Pitts thinks so, and he asserts that “pigment” is depicted in the on-board photographs of Hoa Hakananai’a. He claims that such paint or pigment can “probably safely be regarded as reflecting the statue’s appearance immediately before it was uprooted by Europeans.” I beg to differ.

Palmer (who, as noted above, was not present at the statue’s discovery) says that the statue was “coloured red and white when found.” The problem with Dr. J. Linton Palmer is that he repeated “hearsay without attribution” and his overall reliability was forcefully challenged by W. Scoresby Routledge, who decried how frequently Palmer repeated hearsay (Van Tilburg 2003; 2006:23, 63 n. 116).

Lt. Colin Mackenzie Dundas said that the statue’s back, “when first discovered”, was painted white with “tracings in red”. As we have seen, Lt. Dundas, like J. Linton Palmer, was *not present when the statue was discovered and, thus, is repeating hearsay*. The men who actually *did* discover the statue did not mention paint nor did they note carvings. They said (and Lt. Harrison sketched) the statue *buried to its shoulders* in a dark, stone building (Routledge’s “house” No. 11) which still *had a portion of its roof intact*. Neither the carvings nor any paint, assuming it was present on the statue’s back, could have been visible and none were noted. The statue was thought to be a perfect specimen not because it was embellished with paint or carvings, but because of its location, *the quality of sculpture visible on its face*, and the interest in it displayed by the Rapanui war chief Torometi and at least one Catholic missionary.

Upon demolishing most of the stone structure and removing the statue to the shore, the statue was floated out to the ship on a raft designed for the purpose. Again, it is Dundas and Palmer who state that the paint they claimed was there was washed off during that process. Pitts suggests that if “coloring” or “paint” survived, it “must soon have been cleaned away” by British Museum staff. There is no record that the statue was cleaned by museum staff until it was upright under the Colonnade in 1898 and then again two years later (Van Tilburg 2006:3-4). Prior to that, it was stored lying down on rollers. So, was Hoa Hakananai’a painted?

Comparative Data

We and our colleagues C. Fischer and M. Bahamondez collaborated to conduct scientific analyses of three *moai* in the Museo Nacional de Historia Natural, Santiago (*Megalithic Stone Sculpture from Easter Island (Rapa Nui) in the collection of the Museo Nacional de Historia Natural, Santiago de Chile*, EISP Archives, 2012; www.eisp.org). We did so because we had noted, as early as 1991, that all three statues have red or white surface color visible to the naked eye. The statues in question are EISP MN-SAN-001 (carved of trachyte), MN-SAN-002 (carved of benmoreite), and MN-SAN-003 (carved of tuff similar to that of Rano Raraku).

MN-SAN-001 has a white material that could be a natural pigment made of gypsum. The statue comes from the vicinity of Vaihu. MN-SAN-002 was collected in 1870, just two years after *Topaze*. The white color

on it has a chemical composition that points to a white pigment known as Flemish white. It was manufactured in Flanders during the 19th century. Numerous small white spots visible in the crevices on the surface of the statue are gypsum. Thus, both natural pigment and man-made paint is present. MN-SAN-003 is a very unusual figure that, like Hoa Hakananai'a, references both two-dimensional and three-dimensional carvings. It is painted in red paint that is most likely red ochre and its features are traced in white paint that is probably gypsum.

Therefore, on the basis of these findings, as well as the presence of large quantities of red pigment (*kie'a*) in the excavations we are currently conducting of two statues in Rano Raraku Quarry Interior Region, it is likely that Hoa Hakananai'a had natural color applied to it either before it was buried or upon removal from the house in which it was found. The two statues we are excavating, and Hoa Hakananai'a, are the only ones in the entire corpus embellished with extensive, superimposed, dorsal carvings.

However, I don't agree with Pitts that the heavy tracing of white paint on the dorsal designs of Hoa Hakananai'a is original. It is more in keeping with white outlining done for or by various researchers to make rock carvings more legible in photographs (Lavachery 1939; as on the face of MN-SAN-003). Until there is more convincing research to the contrary, I believe that it is likely that natural paint was present on Hoa Hakananai'a, but the evidence is uncertain. The heavy, white painted outlines of its dorsal designs visible in photographs are modern and done for public display.

Modern Digital Methods and Our Drawings

With regard to Pitts' opinion of the dorsal design elements on Hoa Hakananai'a, I note first that Katherine Routledge (1919) mistook some "birdman" (*tangata manu*) petroglyphs at 'Orongo for "ducks". She noted that six months were required before she (or any of the rest of us, for that matter) gained "intelligent eyes" when viewing Rapanui objects or sites.

In my experience, literal or narrative symbolic interpretations such as Pitts suggests are always highly speculative, especially for Rapa Nui. We reviewed 149 very clearly depicted birdman and frigate bird motifs in our survey, and only two of them have beaks that are not the norm. Neither of them, however, match the depiction Pitts suggests.

We are very familiar with PTM and RTI documentation techniques. Indeed, and thanks to Greg Downing of xRes, we have often used these same techniques to document the designs on the statues we are excavating and the patterns of tool (*toki*) marks on quarry walls. The major issue with regard to PTM, however, is that to advance a thesis of interpretation and avoid bias one must allow review of all of the

90-150 images produced, not just selected ones that support a given point of view.

In the end, our drawings, the available historic and ethnographic data, and standard photographs widely available (Figure 2) convince us that we don't see what Pitts sees. We see the area in question as being deeply scarred with two short, vertical lines in the area of what would be the beak of the element on the right. In fact, while Cristián Arévalo P. was drawing, we both saw overlap that appears to be the result of poor planning when positioning the two elements or, perhaps, evidence of more than one carver. There is also the distinct possibility that the two beaks are conjoined. Cristián's drawings depict what he, as a Rapanui artist who has produced over 4,000 drawings of researched objects, and I as an archaeologist, think we saw (Van Tilburg 2006). Until further evidence is presented we stand behind them.



Figure 2. Close-up of dorsal designs on Hoa Hakananai'i (©Easter Island Statue Project / Jo Anne Van Tilburg).

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